

## CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN – SOMEBODY ELSE’S PROBLEM?

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN - SOMEBODY ELSE'S PROBLEM?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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## CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN - SOMEBODY ELSE'S PROBLEM?

Afghan public enthusiasm for the government is waning after years of unmet expectations. The economy, devastated by more than thirty years of war, has not recovered sufficiently to provide for the people, while the government remains largely ineffective and riven by corruption.<sup>1</sup>

—Independent Task Force Report Number 65  
U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan

Last year's media was full of commentary highlighting corruption in Afghanistan.

Regular reports, like the one above, highlighted the issue of pervasive corruption in Afghanistan. A constant diet of corruption created expectations that something must be done to address this omnipresent issue. Consequently, our strategy responded as if corruption was a "problem" to be solved. Leaders understood that corruption made our mission in Afghanistan harder and naturally they sought out ways to influence the problem. In fact, leaders at the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) established a powerful organization – The Combined Joint Interagency Task Force (CJIATF) Shafafiyat – in an effort to better manage the complexities of the problem. CJIATF Shafafiyat was organized late last year in response to the problem.<sup>2</sup>

Already sensitive to the efficiency of our efforts after nine years in Afghanistan, leaders worked hard to address the problem. Some people warned that corruption is not our problem at all. These people referred to corruption as a "strategic dilemma." The strategic dilemma is this: We acknowledge that corruption has a significant impact on our objectives in Afghanistan; however, we also understand that there is little that we can do to directly impact such a problem for a sovereign nation. Corruption therefore is likely someone else's problem.

There are no “silver bullets” that can quickly eradicate the problem and simplify our mission. However, after so much attention, can we accept an indirect approach that avoids solving this seemingly insurmountable problem? This second group also recognizes that Afghanistan cannot likely solve the issue either. Rather, Afghanistan must learn to work with an acceptable level of corruption. They confirm that the strategic dilemma of corruption in Afghanistan cannot be someone else’s problem; it has to be Afghanistan’s problem.

Both President Barrack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have used the term somebody else’s problem (SEP) to fix responsibility for strategic dilemmas. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, Senator Obama used the term to rally American support saying “there will be pundits and politicians who'll tell you that it's someone else's fault and someone else's problem to fix.”<sup>3</sup> In 2007, French President Sarkozy warned the U.S. Congress "the dollar cannot remain someone else's problem. If we are not careful, monetary disarray could morph into economic war. We would all be victims.”<sup>4</sup> This use of the term SEP views dilemmas from other party’s perspectives and posits that there is no one better positioned to make the difficult choices than those most affected by the dilemma.

Corruption is not somebody else’s problem. In fact, corruption in Afghanistan is not a problem to be solved. Corruption is a dilemma that the Government of Afghanistan must manage. The issue of corruption in Afghanistan implies that Afghanistan’s leaders must make difficult decisions with unpopular choices in order to pursue a specific anticorruption policy. This paper assesses the impact that corruption has on the U.S.

and NATO mission and makes recommendations for addressing the dilemma in order to restore stability and good governance to Afghanistan.

Faced with credible troubled reports like the November 2010 Independent Task Force Report in the epigraph above, President Obama used a 16 December 2010 address to the nation to remind Americans why we remain in Afghanistan. President Obama shared his strategy in the region, saying that “Our **overarching goal** remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”<sup>5</sup> The president then shared three objectives that would enable U.S. strategy for the region:

1. We must **deny al-Qa’ida** a safe haven.
2. We must **reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government.**
3. And we must strengthen the **capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government** so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.<sup>6</sup>

Corruption significantly enables al-Qa’ida and the Taliban while inhibiting the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government. Corruption breaks down the trust that should exist between a government and their people. The people become frustrated that their government and security forces cannot protect them from various forms of corruption. There is a linkage that exists between Objective 3 and corruption. It is clear that the Government of Afghanistan must restore an acceptable level of confidence between the people of Afghanistan and their government if the U.S. is to successfully accomplish this objective.

Considering headlines that regularly make it into the nation's top news media, the President's Afghanistan Update was overall very positive. The President addressed corruption only once saying "we are also supporting Afghanistan's efforts to better improve governance and to build institutions with increased transparency and accountability to reduce corruption – key steps in sustaining the Afghan government..."<sup>7</sup> but was careful not to own the problem by focusing more directly on it.

Independent Task Force Report Number 65 reviewed the U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan and highlighted a problem that President Obama addressed in his third objective — the relationship between ineffective governance and corrupt actors. The task force highlighted a very significant concern for the U.S. saying "widespread official corruption and predatory practices have turned many Afghans against their own government and created opportunities for a Taliban resurgence."<sup>8</sup> This is a real problem for the U.S. It is therefore not surprising that President Obama assessed this concern saying "significant development challenges remain."<sup>9</sup> This issue involves significant strategic risk to our mission and consequently remains a significant concern. President Obama was less optimistic about the progress of governance; rightly so, he seeks President Hamid Karzai support for improving governance.

### The Strategic Environment

This study will use the USAID definition of "corruption" as "the abuse of public position for private gain" which is a significant and growing problem across Afghanistan that undermines security, development, and state- and democracy-building objectives."<sup>10</sup>

Fully appreciating the strategic environment in Afghanistan is necessary to frame corruption in Afghanistan in a meaningful way. A better understanding of the strategic

environment will enable our strategy and thereby better serve U.S. interests. Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) is an Afghan non-governmental organization (NGO) addressing corruption in Afghanistan today. IWA's National Corruption Survey of 2010 shows that "corruption is rampant and has become more entrenched in all areas of life in Afghanistan. Because of corruption, the Afghan population as a whole paid twice as much in bribes in 2009 as it had paid in 2006."<sup>11</sup>

IWA's 2010 Corruption Report shows that corruption is a significant problem at the local, district, and national levels:

In addition to the direct financial costs as well as distortions and inefficiencies resulting from corrupt practices, perceptions of pervasive and systematic corruption undermine the credibility and perceived legitimacy of the government. Thus corruption, a symptom of poor governance, constitutes a serious threat to Afghanistan's entire state-building and development agenda.<sup>12</sup>

Note that IWA links corruption and government legitimacy. Given a long-standing issue like corruption, this linkage may be problematic for President Obama's third objective. Unfortunately, official prospects are not very encouraging. Another NGO, Transparency International (TI), an advocacy organization that tracks corporate and political corruption in international development "ranks Afghanistan as the world's third most corrupt country, behind Somalia and Myanmar."<sup>13</sup>

A review of the strategic environment -- **culture, history, people, government, economics, and competition** – may provide some insights on the way Afghanistan thinks about corruption. These factors influence the range of options available to the U.S. to address corruption. Overall, the impact of these factors in Afghanistan today creates a permissive strategic environment that allows corruption to flourish with little concern for repercussions.

*Culture.* Geert Hofstede, a Maastricht University Emeritus Professor, shares “culture is a defining aspect of the strategic environment. Culture acknowledges that each of us is a product of the environment in which we grew up in.”<sup>14</sup> Applying Hostede’s thinking shows that more than half the population of Afghanistan has never known any existence except war.<sup>15</sup> This certainly programs the collective thinking and suggests a bleak future, or at least one that is not significantly different from what the people have experienced for the last thirty years. Given population demographics, people at all levels have been significantly influenced by both the accepted practice and a growing trend with regard to corruption.

*History.* The problem of corruption today reflects issues that developed over the last three decades of Afghanistan’s history. From 1979 to 1988, serious corruption problems developed during Afghanistan’s war with Russia. Claims by the Soviet Union’s 40<sup>th</sup> Army Commander highlight significant corruption during Afghanistan’s War with Russia. “The Soviet Union had provided Kabul with 100 million rubles worth of economic aid, but that “it all stayed with the elite.”<sup>16</sup>

Other large amounts of money from outside Afghanistan also enabled significant corruption. For example, during the period 1955-1979, the USSR provided \$1.25 billion in military aid and \$1.265 billion in economic aid.<sup>17</sup> During the years 1979-1988, the United States and Saudi Arabia each provided \$2.15 billion in military aid.<sup>18</sup> China and India also provided large sums of money during this time. These large sums of money enabled a small number of privileged leaders in Afghanistan to prosper despite times of adversity for the country. A history of conflict combined with the underdeveloped economy of Afghanistan contributed significantly to the tendency of people to see their

situation as hopeless. These desperate times, in turn, justified their corrupt business practices to earn a living. A majority of Afghanistan's population has not experienced anything except the privations of this period.

*People.* Afghanistan has several types of ethnic groups and is considered a country of minorities. Although "Dari is the most widely spoken language in Afghanistan and the mother-tongue of approximately 50 percent of the population,"<sup>19</sup> there is no ethnicity serving as a majority.<sup>20</sup> The diverse ethnic makeup of the people of Afghanistan has largely been influenced by Afghanistan's location along the Silk Road, a historic trade route between the East and West. The Silk Road influenced cultural, commercial and technology as "traders, merchants, pilgrims, missionaries, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers" interacted between "Ancient China, India, Tibet, The Persian Empire and Mediterranean countries for almost 3,000 years."<sup>21</sup> Nine major ethnic groups and many smaller groups make for a very diverse people. Each one of these ethnic groups has their own culture and tradition as well as their language.<sup>22</sup>

*Government.* Today, the lack of a well established local government in much of Afghanistan is a significant destabilizing factor. Afghanistan's diverse population naturally favors a strong local government and a decentralized national government. The local government has the strength of meeting the needs of the locals and the weakness of little oversight over a local leader who may be prone to corruption. If a community has an autocratic leader who is abusing power, it is unlikely that the central government will do much to serve the needs of the local community.

*Economics.* A history of strife and conflict in an underdeveloped nation has created an economy with a growing dependence on aid organizations. The World Bank

rates Afghanistan at or near the bottom of 183 countries in the areas of: trading across borders, registering property, protecting investors, procuring construction permits, enforcing contracts, and time and cost required to resolve bankruptcies.<sup>23</sup> With a record like this, the population cannot have a positive view of business opportunities and is therefore vulnerable to corrupt practices. The combination of a relatively young population with limited opportunities for employment [35% unemployment rate] contributes to unrest and to a tendency for individuals to feel destitute.<sup>24</sup> With their history and economy, Afghanistan has certainly earned the descriptor of being a war torn country.

*Competition.* Large amounts of economic and military aid provided by Russia, United States., United Kingdom, China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt over the past thirty years has encouraged competition amongst Afghans for billions of dollars. A Center for Strategic International Studies report suggests that up to 40 percent of all foreign aid goes to corruption, security, and overhead.<sup>25</sup> This figure suggests those who need the aid the most are often the ones who benefit the least. There is another competition that is growing in concern:

So-called NGOs -- non-governmental organizations that range from charities to "not-for-profit" infrastructure providers -- are ballooning in Afghanistan, raising fears that they are consuming far more of aid budgets than they should, while delivering far less than they promise.<sup>26</sup>

After finding out that "only 23 percent of several billion dollars intended for international assistance is directly administered by the Afghan government, with the balance in the hands of humanitarian aid agencies or private contractors" the Afghan Cabinet took measures to address the perception of "widespread corruption and misuse of public funds."<sup>27</sup>



Afghanistan, like many developing countries with weak institutions, has long had a major problem with corruption. Toss tendencies towards autocratic power and ethnic strife into the mix, and it comes as no surprise that competition for aid dollars has only accelerated and deepened problems with corruption.<sup>28</sup>

The lure of the two largest opportunities for income in Afghanistan, foreign aid and the drug trade, create significant competition amongst otherwise limited opportunities to make money. The combination of destitute citizens and these extreme opportunities fuels this competition and often drives otherwise law abiding citizens into corruption.

These key factors in Afghanistan's strategic environment influence many forms of corruption that exist in the country today. There seems no end in innovative ways to abuse entrusted power for private gain. Some of the more prevalent forms of corruption include graft, bribery, trading influence, patronage, nepotism, elections, embezzlement, kickbacks, organized crime, and drug trade.<sup>29</sup> In fact "...for an overwhelming 59% of the population the daily experience of public dishonesty is a bigger concern than insecurity (54%) and unemployment (52%)."<sup>30</sup> This trend creates distrust between the people and their government and increases the risk associated with the success of the U.S. and NATO mission in Afghanistan by destabilizing the region.

### The Nature of the Issue

Ms. Caron, a technologist experienced in wicked problems, suggests that "we are moving from a world of problems to a world of dilemmas," where situations with unsatisfactory choices prevail.<sup>31</sup> This is certainly true with regard to the nature of corruption. She contends that while **problems** demand speed, analysis, and elimination of uncertainty to solve, **dilemmas** demand patience, sense making with engagement of uncertainty to manage.<sup>32</sup>

The United States Army War College (USAWC) developed the acronym VUCA to help leaders thrive in an increasingly complex world. Applying the acronym – **volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity** – helps leaders make sense out of the future. Therefore, this paper uses an adaptation of the term to make assessments about the nature of corruption in Afghanistan. The USAWC encouraged “VUCA Practitioners” to first understand the complex nature of the environment and then, armed with this situational awareness, seek solutions for problems. Using VUCA to think ahead about corruption will improve situational awareness and enable recommendations for specific actions.

*Corruption is Volatile.* Corruption exists in Afghanistan as a complex adaptive system at local, district, and national levels. Therefore, its rate of change varies daily based on opportunities and risks in the environment. This complex adaptive system creates significant challenges for a limited number of coalition forces operating in the large expanses of Afghanistan. Even with the added advantage of the current “surge” of forces on the ground, coalition forces do not have a significant decisive capability throughout the country. In fact, although U.S. forces have enjoyed significant progress since July 2010, a lack of combat power prior to this period prevented U.S. forces from being decisive enough to defeat the threat.

The opium business is an example of the volatile environment that exists in much of Afghanistan today. Opium is a large international business that is supported by well developed criminal networks of traders, logisticians, security forces, and farmers and is apt to become violent or dangerous. In the drug business, there is corruption at all levels. “Traders are powerful people” who work as “government officials, high-ranking

policemen, and members of parliament” to enable their primary income producing job as an international drug trader.<sup>33</sup> Paul Kan’s book, *Drugs and Contemporary Warfare* highlights how adaptive the drug business has become through a paradox. “Developing any kind of profitable, export-oriented business in Afghanistan is close to impossible -- unless it is the drug business.”<sup>34</sup> Understanding the challenges of terrain, the extremes of weather, difficulties of infrastructure, and the primitive farming techniques makes this accomplishment all the more amazing. “Afghanistan is home to some of the world’s most imaginative, audacious, ruthless, and profitable export business organizations: drug traders.” It quickly becomes evident that countering a well established market requires significant persistent efforts and resources to overcome powerful and well established networks. As of March 2010, Afghanistan is “the greatest illicit opium producer in the world. Reports show that opium production in Afghanistan has been on the rise since 2001, when the U.S. occupation started.”<sup>35</sup> The inability of the U.S. and NATO war effort to curb a world record setting drug trade foretells our inability to influence other forms of corruption.

*Corruption is Uncertain.* Corruption is uncertain because it is “not definitely ascertainable or fixed, as in time of occurrence, number, dimensions, or quality.”<sup>36</sup> This characteristic makes corruption very difficult to address. The uncertain and secretive nature of corruption empowers it to exploit power at every available opportunity.<sup>37</sup> The following examples highlight the ways that uncertainty enables corruption and show the impact that corruption has on reconstruction, poverty, and business opportunities:

- “Economic **uncertainty** encourages politicians to exploit current opportunities.” Given the years of uncertainty and the feast or famine

existence which exists with foreign aid, “Very few officials can anticipate lifelong job security or a guaranteed pension.”<sup>38</sup>

- “Corruption flourishes in periods of **economic and political uncertainty** as politicians and officials seize their chances. Corruption thrives on inefficiency and increased trade for the corrupt politician means more opportunities for bribes.”<sup>39</sup>
- “If corruption is deeply entrenched and pervasive in a country, it is likely to discourage foreign direct investment (FDI) because it raises the costs and **uncertainties** of making investments.” A lack of FDI significantly impacts poverty reduction.<sup>40</sup>
- Often times, the “ambiguous and ill-defined nature of the constitutional status creates further room for financial maneuver and **uncertainty** about how to restrict their activities.”<sup>41</sup>
- Corruption increases the **uncertainty** and risk attached to investment as well as reducing the incentive for entrepreneurs. According to International Monetary Fund research, lowering investment accounts for at least one third of corruption's overall negative effects.<sup>42</sup>

*Corruption is Complex.* At the University of Navarra Spain, Professors Calderón and Alvarez highlight a theory that relates corruption to complexity in their review entitled “The Complexity of Corruption: Nature and Ethical Suggestions.”<sup>43</sup> These economic professors suggest that although corruption is widely studied, significant “disagreements remain about how to define its causes and consequences.” They suggest that this general lack of consensus reflects the complexity of the problem.<sup>44</sup>

The manipulation of complexity, the overall volatile and uncertain nature of corruption, creates opportunities as individuals control their environment to enable corruption to thrive. For example, the success of the opium trade can be viewed as a situation where drug traders thrive in complexity by taking advantage of opportunities created by the lack of governance, security and rule of law. The relatively “ungoverned environment” enables drug traders to thrive in the chaos.

Professors Calderón and Alvarez summarize their study by characterizing complexity “as an extremely rich system, with many and very different elements connected through complex non-linear interactions.” They believe that corruption is a system that responds to both internal and external influences in order to survive. The professors share that “generously funded anti-corruption programs have failed on a global scale precisely because partial analyses have encouraged a nonintegrated approach.”<sup>45</sup> They contend that the complex nature of corruption can only be “captured by a holistic interdisciplinary approach.” These ideas highlight the need for a well integrated effort to understand the complexity of corruption in Afghanistan. Such complex effort in a sovereign nation should be directly responsible to the president.

*Corruption is Ambiguous.* The Encarta Electronic Dictionary defines ambiguous as “having one or more meaning” and “causing uncertainty.”<sup>46</sup> Corruption thrives in an ambiguous environment where laws and regulation may not be well established or enforced. Corrupt actors view these environments as permissive and seek to exploit lack of regulation and security to their advance. Their secretive nature combined with the environment is essential to the security and freedom of action of illicit actors. This secretive nature allows them to avoid public accountability.

A broad approach involving systems, programs, policies and regulation may offer help in addressing the issue of corruption. For example, in 2009, the Afghan National Police exploited technology “to pay salaries through mobile telephones, rather than in cash” using Afghanistan’s relatively robust cellular network.<sup>47</sup> In a country of 28 million, there are 12 million cell phones. This network offered the Afghan government a significant opportunity to address corruption:

- It immediately found that at least 10% of its payments had been going to ghost policemen who didn’t exist; middlemen in the police hierarchy were pocketing the difference.
- Salaries for Afghan police and soldiers are calculated to be competitive with Taliban salaries, but police and deployed soldiers had been receiving only a fraction of the amount paid by U.S. taxpayers because of corruption in the payment system.
- Most Afghan police assumed that they had been given a significant raise, when, in fact, they simply received their full pay for the first time--over the phone.<sup>48</sup>

The Afghan people have embraced the cell phone. The challenge is now how best to integrate technology into other programs and policies that are meaningful to the people. Technology in the existing network offers powerful options for combating corruption.

Given the intensity of the problem, this paper further defines Ms. Caron’s dilemma as a strategic dilemma, one that is not solved but must be managed. The nature of corruption in Afghanistan is a strategic dilemma. Corruption is “unsolvable, complex and often messy, threatening, enigmatic and confusing, and has two or more

puzzling choices.”<sup>49</sup> Assessments from surveys done by IWA and TI suggest the all-encompassing nature of Afghanistan’s corruption. The New York Times, highlighted corruption's "overwhelming scale, and the dispiriting challenge it poses to American officials" in a recent study.<sup>50</sup> The article showed that “bribery, extortion and embezzlement are the norm and the honest official is a distinct outlier.”<sup>51</sup> These indicators define the nature of corruption as a dilemma requiring long term efforts.

*Work done by GIRoA to Combat Corruption.* Understanding the significant work that has been done is as important as understanding the nature of the issue of corruption. The work appropriately starts in The Constitution of Afghanistan which addresses corruption in three separate articles:<sup>52</sup>

- Article 7 – “The state shall prevent all kinds of terrorist activities, cultivation and smuggling of narcotics, and production and use of intoxicants.”
- Article 75, Section 3 – “Maintain public law and order and eliminate every kind of administrative corruption.”
- Article 142 – “To implement the provisions as well as attain values enshrined in this Constitution, the state shall establish necessary offices.”

Afghan officials developed a coherent approach to anti corruption in close coordination with the international community. The High Office for Oversight and Anti-corruption has direct responsibility to the President for anti corruption activities. President Karzai appointed a separate Ministry of Counter Narcotics to lead all counter-narcotics activities and efforts. Other important work includes:

- Worked closely with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).<sup>53</sup> Afghanistan has benefitted from many UN programs. The

following UN Programs include some of the most helpful in terms of Afghanistan's anti corruption work: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations' global development network which "...advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life."<sup>54</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is "committed to achieving health, security and justice for all by tackling such global threats, and by delivering legal and technical assistance to prevent terrorism."<sup>55</sup> The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the "...first legally binding international anti-corruption instrument."<sup>56</sup>

- Established Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) in early 2005<sup>57</sup>
- Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2005, Vision 2020<sup>58</sup>
- Signed the Afghanistan Compact 1 February 2006 committing it to realizing this shared vision of the future with the international community, who in turn commits itself to provide resources and support to realize that vision.<sup>59</sup>
- Developed a Road-map for fighting Corruption in Afghanistan, February 16, 2007<sup>60</sup>
- Analyzed public-opinion survey on the opinions and perceptions of Afghans towards government, public policy, democracy, and political and social change through the Asian Foundation, December 2008 <sup>61</sup>



- Developed the Afghanistan National Development Strategy to outline strategies for security, governance, economic growth and poverty reduction. April 2008<sup>62</sup>
- Developed a Policy for Anti Corruption Strategy and Administrative Reform, April 2008<sup>63</sup>
- Established the High Office for Oversight and Anti-corruption (HOOAC) for the implementation of a detailed Anti-Corruption Strategy, 2008<sup>64</sup>
- Held a Corruption in Fragile States Conference on May 9, 2009 that highlighted the main risks of corruption in post-conflict countries and the challenges and opportunities for donors<sup>65</sup>
- Developed an Anti-Corruption Assessment-Strategy, January 15, 2009 by working closely with USAID who commissioned an assessment to provide a strategy, program options, and recommendations on needs and opportunities to strengthen the capacity and political will of the Government of Afghanistan to fulfill its National Anti-Corruption Strategy.<sup>66</sup>
- Developed an Anti Corruption Strategic Plan 2011-2013<sup>67</sup>
- Established a Web Site for the High Office for Oversight and Anti-corruption (HOOAC)<sup>68</sup>

The work above shows significant international support and a corresponding commitment by the GIRoA to address the issue of corruption in Afghanistan.

#### Assess the Strategic Risk in Afghanistan

John Collins notes in his book, *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices*, that discrepancies between **ends** and **means** creates risk when there is a mismatch

between interests or objectives and available resources.<sup>69</sup> After reviewing current public opinion polls and listening to recent testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), it is apparent that the U.S. may have a mismatch between ends and means. A recent Washington Post and ABC News Poll surveying 1,005 Americans regarding the war in Afghanistan suggest "... the war in Afghanistan is **no longer worth fighting.**" The SASC testimony of General David H. Petraeus, Commander, International Security Assistance Forces Afghanistan (ISAF) assessed the probability of success in Afghanistan in a cautiously optimistic way. General Petraeus assessed that "Progress in Afghanistan was 'Fragile and Reversible' but warned that it would be unwise to abandon the mission, despite the U.S. public's opposition to the war."<sup>70</sup> The public opinion poll addressed "acceptable costs" as too high and suggested that the war is not worth it. General Petraeus addressed risk in failure of strategic objectives. Each approach assesses risk differently. The public opinion poll likely looked at the acceptable costs in terms of the lives lost, time spent, and money spent. General Petraeus looked at risk in terms of accomplishment of strategic objectives to assess acceptable cost.<sup>71</sup>

Note in Figure 1 the steady growth of this trend since late 2009. This is a record setting and sizeable trend that will play significantly in the political risk that President Obama must consider as he stands by his commitments to begin withdrawing troops in

the summer of 2011.

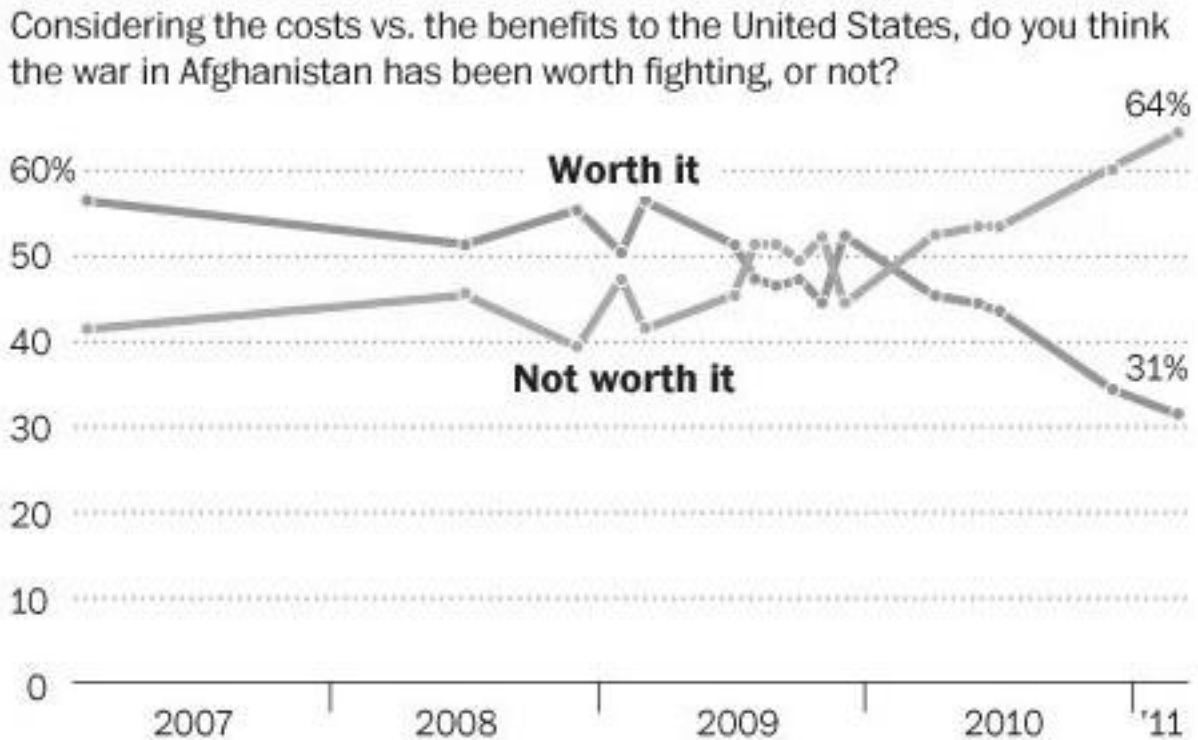


Figure 1:- 10-13 March Washington Post / ABC Poll

The percentage of Americans who believe that the president should withdraw a “substantial number” of combat troops this summer is even higher at 73%.<sup>72</sup>

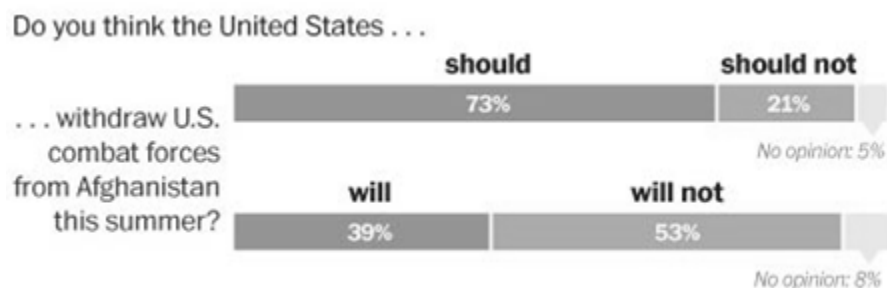


Figure 2:- 10-13 March Washington Post / ABC Poll

Each survey suggests that we have exceeded acceptable costs. Such strong public opinion has historically influenced public leader's decisions.

General Petraeus' testimony before the SACS recognized these strong current public sentiments and consequently encouraged senate leaders to stand by our important commitments in Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup> The impact of a prevailing public opinion was evident during General Petraeus' testimony and will likely play increasingly significant roles in our policy in Afghanistan as the U.S. gets closer to the 2012 election.

Given that U.S. forces are at their peak this year and could begin reductions starting this summer, it is evident that success is at a tipping point. By characterizing successes as "fragile" and "reversible," General Petraeus acknowledged both the prospects for success and failure.<sup>74</sup>

Translating General Petraeus' comments into a quantifiable strategic risk is an important take away from his current testimony. General Petraeus was even handed when considering the current probability of success. His acknowledgement of "fragile" and "reversible" translates into a medium probability of success. Given President Obama and General Petraeus' continued discussion of vital national interests for this region, the impact of failure on our interests would be critical.<sup>75</sup> Such a significant strategic risk to our national interests demands significant work to mitigate. General Petraeus certainly acknowledges this.

		Probability of Success			
Impact on Interests	Catastrophic		High		High
	Critical				
	Marginal				Low
	Negligible				
		Low	Medium	High	

Figure 3: - Strategic Risk for the Overall Mission in Afghanistan

“In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Petraeus cautioned that security progress is still 'fragile and reversible,' with much difficult work ahead as the Taliban launch an expected spring offensive.”<sup>76</sup> There are other significant issues that have to be addressed to enable success including “the reconciliation process with more moderate Taliban, establishment of a more capable government and the effort to persuade the Afghan people.”<sup>77</sup> Another issue involving safe havens along the Pakistan border remains a problem that the administration has to figure into plans prior to a 2014 withdrawal. Like the American public, a growing number of congressional leaders are impatient with the war in the face of increasing budget pressure.

The assessment of “high” strategic risk frames the mission in Afghanistan in an important way. If, in fact, vital interests are at stake, the national security of the U.S. could be in peril. The U.S. therefore cannot afford to be indecisive or inefficient given our current commitment to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

### Strategy Recommendations

Thinking in terms of the strategic framework of ends, ways, and means is useful when developing strategic guidance for focusing our plan and resources to support Afghanistan in their anti corruption efforts.<sup>78</sup> Absent such a framework, our work

becomes difficult and unity of effort problems develop when large groups of people do not clearly understand the desired outcome, courses of action, or what resources are available to support the plan.<sup>79</sup> The recommendations below should be used as strategic guidance for dealing with corruption. This strategic guidance forms the basis of a strategy that supports Afghanistan's anti corruption efforts.

The CJIATF- Shafafiyat should develop in close coordination with the Afghan government a detailed plan that spells out:

- What specifically is to be done by the CJIATF?
- How is this work to be done?
- What resources are required to do it in this manner?<sup>80</sup>

Ideally, to ensure unity of effort, this plan should be approved by appropriate Afghanistan officials, possibly by the High Office of Oversight and Anti Corruption.

- Use the CJIATF as an instrument that ensures the success of both the U.S. and Afghanistan. Where problems develop, use the CJIATF to diffuse friction and to identify practical solutions that maintain unity of effort. The U.S. effort should focus on helping the GIRoA realize the accountability and transparency goals they have established in their strategies for anti corruption and development.<sup>81</sup>
- Use CJIATF to achieve President Obama's objectives of "**denying al-Qa'ida** a safe haven... **reversing the Taliban's momentum and denying it the ability to overthrow the government and ... strengthening the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government** so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future."<sup>82</sup>

- Use CJIATF to enable Afghanistan to build and maintain a strong partnership with the international community in order to provide the security, stability and prosperity.
- Focus CJIATF to manage perceptions carefully in order to avoid aggressive uni-lateral approaches to anticorruption which are insensitive to the current environment and a sovereign GIRoA. An issue came up during "a September 2010 rift" with the Karzai Administration resulting in U.S. officials trying to convince President Karzai that we are on his team and need his cooperation.<sup>83</sup> As the GIRoA builds capacity and becomes more independent, more changes are likely required. Use CJIATF to manage the transition effectively.
- Using CJIATF, carefully craft terms of reference to encourage support across the entire CJIATF members while maintaining unity of effort.<sup>84</sup> Recognize that anti corruption efforts are in their infancy and will require time and continued support.
- Use the CJIATF to stay focused on the people of Afghanistan recognizing that "the people of Afghanistan will be the ultimate arbiter of the acceptable level of corruption."<sup>85</sup>
- Use CJIATF to recognize the difficulties of the environment and to maintain a positive approach to managing expectations that avoids frustrating team efforts.
- Working with CJIATF, figure out how to share lessons learned from the international community using experts and leaders from places like Indonesia,

Hong Kong, Georgia, Albania, Tanzania and Rwanda, who have recently dealt with similar problems. Firsthand experience would be far more beneficial to Afghan leaders “who might react more positively to hearing suggestions” for improving governance and accountability than from Americans.<sup>86</sup>

- Maintain a realistic climate in the CJIAF that is neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic. Keep the CJIAF focused on meaningful work that advances the interests of the GIRA anti corruption efforts.

The anti corruption efforts of CJIAF must ensure the success of both the U.S. and Afghanistan in order to achieve President Obama’s objectives that enable President Karzai to satisfy GIRA’s commitments towards combating corruption and promoting transparency and accountability as is indicated in their constitution.

### Conclusion

Since corruption competes with large annual commitments that the United States has made to Afghanistan, it is a serious concern for the U.S. Government. Having invested billions of U.S. dollars to meet our objectives, the American public is growing anxious to see returns on the key objectives that President Obama established in Afghanistan.

Soon after assuming office and while reviewing our interests in Afghanistan, President Obama referred to Afghanistan as a “wicked problem,” calling Afghanistan a “tough struggle, a Himalayan slog that we must win.”<sup>87</sup> The issue of corruption has grown so significantly that leaders in Afghanistan use the same “wicked problem” descriptor to characterize corruption. “Solutions to wicked problems are not right or wrong, simply ‘better,’ ‘worse,’ ‘good enough,’ or ‘not good enough.’”<sup>88</sup> Faced with the



dilemma of how best to help in this environment, finding areas of common interest and moving forward together seems responsible.

The president aptly recognized that U.S. forces will have to make their way in a very tough environment. In such an environment, a unified effort that serves mutual interests is essential if stakeholders are to work together effectively. There have been many efforts at unifying the international community to support Afghanistan. In fact, the Afghanistan Compact met in London in 2006, to address this issue.

Working closely with the United Nations, the international community and Afghanistan identified “three critical and interdependent areas or pillars of activity” and committed themselves each to support these pillars for five years from the adoption of the Compact:

1. Security;
2. Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights; and
3. Economic and Social Development.

A further vital and cross-cutting area of work is eliminating the narcotics industry, which remains a formidable threat to the people and state of Afghanistan, the region and beyond.”<sup>89</sup> These pillars have much in common with President Obama’s three objectives. For example, Afghanistan’s first pillar compliments U.S. objectives 1, 2 and 3.

Afghanistan		United States	
1	<b>Security</b>	1	<b>We must <del>deny</del> al-Qa'ida a safe haven</b>
2	<b>Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights</b>	2	<b>We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government.</b>
3	<b>Economic and Social Development</b>	3	<b>We must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.</b>
4	<b>Eliminating the narcotics industry</b>		

Figure 4: Mutual Interests

Afghanistan's second pillar compliments U.S. objective 3. Afghanistan's pillar 3 and 4 compliment U.S. objective 3. Continuing this approach towards mutually supporting objectives will enable strategic objectives of both parties and while enabling significant progress in the area of anti corruption.

Therefore, to finish what we started, corruption is not somebody else's problem. Corruption is such a culturally sensitive and difficult issue, that the solution will likely require political concessions that can only be made by sovereign leaders. Therefore, corruption is not a problem for the U.S. to solve directly. Rather, as GIRoA improves on the efficiency of their governance, rule of law and security, pillars that they agreed to in the Afghanistan Compact, corruption will become less of an issue. As the institutions in Afghanistan mature and develop in effectiveness, Afghanistan can decide on new commitments that take a more direct approach. However, given the nature of corruption and its prevalence in Afghanistan, an indirect approach by the international community would likely be more effective.

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<sup>87</sup> Austin Bay, "Afghanistan's Wicked Problems," Strategy Page, February 10, 2009 [http://www.strategypage.com/on\\_point/2009021023362.aspx](http://www.strategypage.com/on_point/2009021023362.aspx) (accessed 26 December 2010); The article develops the idea of the wicked problem saying "Wicked" problems are dynamic and multidimensional -- intricate, constantly changing challenges that frustrate precise definition. As a wicked problem evolves, we can learn a lot about it -- useful knowledge informing constructive action. But the problem will still change in unforeseen and unexpected ways, seeding "unknown unknowns" that produce surprise. In a wicked problem like a war, surprise may be fatal." Austin Bay, "Afghanistan's Wicked Problems," *Real Clear World*, February 10, 2009; [http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/02/afghanistans\\_wicked\\_problems.html](http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/02/afghanistans_wicked_problems.html) (accessed 5 January 2011).

<sup>88</sup> The CogNexus Institute Home Page, <http://cognexus.org/id42.htm> (accessed 26 December 2010).

<sup>89</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan, *The Afghanistan Compact*, (London: UNAMA, January 31, 2006); [http://trade.gov/static/afghanistan\\_compact.pdf](http://trade.gov/static/afghanistan_compact.pdf) (accessed 17 March 2011).

